

PIONEER DESCENDANTS TO GATHER AT CUMBERLAND GAP

Louisville, KY (AP)

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LOUISVILLE, KY – Denny Custer says his family plans to walk the same trail used by his ancestors to travel west through a gap in the Appalachian mountain range some two centuries ago.

The Michigan family will participate in a walk this weekend into the Cumberland Gap at the border of present-day Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia – about 200 miles southeast of Louisville.

Custer said that in 1779, his family members came over the gap en route to Bryan's station, northeast of Lexington. They included his fourth great-grandfather, John Power Jr., Power's brother, James, and their father, John Power Sr.

"We owe so much to all of those early pioneers, indeed, our very lives," Custer said. "It will be a great honor to march over the gap in their memory."

John Power Jr.'s wife was Elizabeth Boone, daughter of Israel Boone, who was the eldest brother of Daniel Boone.

Cumberland Gap National Park Ranger Pam Eddy says descendants of thousands of people who went through the gateway to the west will be offered a feel for the experience along with anyone else who wishes to participate. The crowd will gather at the park's visitor's center on Oct. 25, then be guided into the gap at sunset.

They will carry replicas of 18th century lanterns bearing their family surnames.

The event, Oct. 24 to 26, is part of a national Lincoln Bicentennial observance and is called "the Pioneer Roots of our National Destiny – The Lincoln Family Moves West."

President Lincoln's grandfather, also named Abraham, may have brought his family through the Cumberland Gap in the early 1780s to settle in Kentucky, said Dr. Thomas Mackey, a University of Louisville history professor.

One of Abraham Lincoln Sr.'s sons, Thomas, became the father of President Lincoln.

Both Mackey and Curator Jim Holmberg of Louisville's Filson Historical Society, say it isn't definite that grandfather Lincoln and his family came through the gap and a river route has also been considered.

Carnelia Lueddecke, 73, of Piedmont, MO visited the Gap a decade ago and is excited about this year's walk.

"I think it's fantastic place," she said.

A road that had been built over the trail that allowed vehicular traffic through the gap was closed in October 1996 so that the original trail could be restored.

On Memorial Day 2002, the trail was reopened to pedestrians.

Eddy said the celebration will focus on the forefathers of an estimated 48 million Americans whose family trees can be traced to a Cumberland Gap pioneer.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>